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Message Text

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SS-15 USIA-06 /069 W
----------119340 111914Z /53
P R 111759Z JAN 78
FM AMEMBASSY PARIS
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 4130
INFO ALL EC CAPITALS
AMEMBASSY MADRID
AMEMBASSY LISBON
AMEMBASSY WARSAW
AMEMBASSY TEHRAN
AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI
AMEMBASSY JIDDA
AMEMBASSY CAIRO
AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS
AMCONSUL BORDEAUX
AMCONSUL LYON
AMCONSUL MARSEILLE
AMCONSUL NICE
AMCONSUL STRASBOURG

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 PARIS 00920

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, FR, US
SUBJECT: PRESIDENT'S VISIT: MANY PROS AND A FEW CONS

SUMMARY: FROMTHE US POINT OF VIEW THE PRESIDENT'S VISIT SEEMS A SOLID SUCCESS, AFFORDING AN OPPORTUNITY FOR THE TWO PRESIDENTS TO DISCUSS NEARLY EVERY IMPORTANT WORLD PROBLEM, CONSOLIDATING THE RECENT PROGRESS IN THE BILATERAL RELATIONSHIP, AND GIVING GISCARD A BOOST AS THE ELECTORAL PERIOD GOES INTO ITS FINAL TWO MONTHS. THE ELYSEE HAS REPEATEDLY AND WE BELIEVE CONFIDENTIAL

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SINCERELY REITERATED TO US HOW DELIGHTED GISCARD HIMSELF IS WITH THE VISIT. MOST OTHER FRENCHMEN WITH WHOM WE HAVE TALKED HAVE REMARKED ON THE FAVORABLE IMPRESSION MADE BY THE PRESIDENT, BOTH THROUGH THE MEDIA AND IN HIS SEVERAL PUBLIC APPEARANCES. IN THE FRENCH CONTEXT, GISCARD OF COURSE BENEFITTED THE MOST, AS HE WAS BEFORE THE FRENCH PUBLIC ON THE CENTER STAGE

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WITH THE PRESIDENT FOR THE BETTER PART OF THREE DAYS RUNNING. HE WILL PROBABLY CONTINUE TO FIND WAYS TO REMIND THE FRENCH PEOPLE OF THE VISIT (AS HE DID IN HIS PRESS CONFERENCE AFTER THE PRESIDENT DEPARTED) AND BE REMEMBERED FOR A TIME AS THE FRENCH LEADER WHO WELCOMED PRESIDENT CARTER. THE SOCIALISTS ARE NO LESS PLEASED BY FRANCOIS MITTERRAND'S MEETING WITH THE PRESIDENT, BUT ON THIS ISSUE NOT ALL FRENCHMEN BY A LONG SHOT ARE IN AGREEMENT. THE MEETING PROVOKED PREDICTABLE SHOTS FROM THE GAULLISTS AND COMMUNISTS, AND EVEN FOREIGN MINISTER DE GUIRINGAUD FELT OBLIGED TO CHIME IN ON JANUARY 10 BY CRITICIZING MITTERRAND FOR FAILING TO SHOW THE SAME OPENNESS TOWARD GISCARD THAT HE RESERVED FOR PRESIDENT CARTER. MORE IMPORTANT, CHIRAC PROFESSED TO BE SCANDALIZED AT THE MITTERRAND MEETING. THESE DISCORDANT NOTES, HOWEVER, REMAIN SECONDARY TO THE BIG STORY OF LAST WEEK AND DO NOT FOR NOW SEEM TO HAVE DETRACTED APPRECIABLY FROM THE SUCCESS OF THAT STORY. END SUMMARY.

1. TO THOSE FRENCHMEN WITH WHOM WE HAVE SPOKEN, THE MAIN RESULTS AND IMPRESSIONS TO COME OUT OF PRESIDENT CARTER'S 48 HOURS IN FRANCE WERE THAT THE VISIT:

-- DEMONSTRATED THAT OUR RELATIONS WITH FRANCE ARE AT THEIR BEST STATE IN MANY YEARS;

-- SHOWED THAT THE US AND FRANCE ARE ABLE TO

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TALK OUT DIFFERENCES TOGETHER IN AN ATMOSPHERE OF FRIENDSHIP

-- GAVE THE PRESIDENT AN OPPORTUNITY TO WIN POINTS WITH THE SENSITIVE FRENCH IN PAYING HOMAGE TO FRENCH INDEPENDENCE AND EUROPEAN UNITY;

-- AND, BY FOCUSSING ON THE PERSONAL CONTACT AND LENGTHY DISCUSSIONS BETWEEN THE TWO PRESIDENTS, GAVE GISCARD THE RECOGNITION HE SEEKS DOMESTICALLY AS A STATESMAN WHOSE OPINION IS SOUGHT AFTER AND WHO HAS A CONTRIBUTION TO MAKE ON A WIDE RANGE OF INTERNATIONAL PROBLEMS.

MORE GENERALLY, THE STYLE OF THE PRESIDENT HAS BEEN A RECURRENT THEME. FRENCHMEN SAW HIS VISIT POSITIVELY: AS LESS ENCUMBERED BY PROTOCOL THAN THE USUAL HEAD OF STATE VISIT AND MORE DIRECTED TOWARD SERIOUS DISCUSSIONS OF THE MOST DIFFICULT INTERNATIONAL PROBLEMS. HERE AGAIN, THIS REDOUNDED TO GISCARD'S BENEFIT. THE PRESIDENT'S EASY STYLE, INTEREST IN PERSONAL

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CONTACT WITH THE FRENCH PUBLIC AND WILLINGNESS TO
LEARN ABOUT THE COMPLEXITIES OF THIS COUNTRY, ITS
POLITICAL MOVEMENTS AND ITS ARTISTIC HERITAGE WERE

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 02 OF 03 PARIS 00920

WELL RECEIVED BY A VAST TV AUDIENCE. GISCARD'S OWN
PREFERENCE FOR INFORMALITY HELPED CONVEY AN IMPRESSION
OF TWO LEADERS WHO GET ALONG WELL TOGETHER, WHO NEED
NOT LOSE TIME ON PROTOCOL AND WHO CAN GET RIGHT DOWN
TO WORK.

2. IF THE PRESIDENT'S MEETING WITH MITTERRAND RAISED
HACKLES IN SOME QUARTERS, THIS WAS ANYTHING BUT THE
CASE FOR THE SOCIALISTS. THEY CAN ONLY BE DESCRIBED,

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WITHOUT EXAGGERATION, AS THRILLED WITH THE MEETING, AS WELL AS THE COMMENT ON MITTERRAND'S "BENEFICIAL IMPACT" WHICH THE PS CONSIDERS A WINDFALL. INITIALLY UPSET OVER THE WHITE HOUSE BACKGROUNDER ABOUT OUR WARNINGS OF PCF INTENTIONS, THE PS QUICKLY COOLED OFF AFTER RECOGNIZING THAT THE PUBLIC AND MEDIA WERE FOCUSSING ON THE MEETING ITSELF AND THE PRESIDENT'S WARM WELCOME RATHER THAN ON ANY FOLLOW-UP CLARIFICATION. IN ADDITION, THE PS HAS SUFFERED SO MUCH PCF ABUSE LATELY THAT CRITICISM FROM THAT QUARTER OF ANY ALLEGED US INTERFERENCE IN INTERNAL FRENCH AFFAIRS AND CRITICISM OF MITTERRAND FOR NOT REBUTTING CARTER'S WARNINGS ABOUT THE PCF IS TAKEN AS JUST ANOTHER DROP IN THE BUCKET. THE LONGER-TERM EFFECT IS HARDER TO JUDGE. BUT ONE CLOSE ASSOCIATE OF THE PS FIRST SECRETARY TOLD US HE FELT THE MEETING WOULD HELP MITTERRAND IN THE ELECTION CAMPAIGN BY ENHANCING HIS IMAGE AS A MODERATE AND, FOR WHATEVER VALUE IT IS WORTH IN FRANCE, RECEIVING WHAT IS SEEN HERE AS A US STAMP OF APPROVAL. THIS ASSOCIATE RELATED HOW MITTERRAND WAS GREETED WITH UNUSUAL ENTHUSIASM IN BURGUNDY, DURING A CAMPAIGN SWING THE SAME AFTERNOON AS HIS MEETING WITH THE PRESIDENT. MITTERRAND'S LOCAL FANS COULD HARDLY BELIEVE THAT THE MAN IN FRONT OF THEM WAS THE SAME MAN THEY SAW ON TV WITH THE PRESIDENT SEVERAL HOURS EARLIER. AS FOR THE RIGHT, THE EMBASSY HAS RECEIVED MANY COMPLAINTS FROM GAULLISTS AND OTHERS THAT THE PRESIDENT'S REFERENCE TO MITTERRAND'S "BENEFICIAL" IMPACT WAS A GRATUITOUS ASSIST TO THE LEFT.

3. IN ADDITION TO OBJECTING TO THE MITTERRAND MEETING, THE RPR IS OF COURSE SMARTING FROM THE PRESIDENT'S NON-CALL AT THE PARIS CITY HALL. THEY REPEAT THAT MANY FRENCHMEN FEEL THAT THE TRADITION OF SUCH A VISIT DOES

EXIST, THAT THE OMISSION WAS A SLIGHT TO THE INHABITANTS OF THE CITY, AND THAT THE

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 03 OF 03 PARIS 00920

PROBLEM COULD HAVE BEEN AVOIDED AT A MINOR COST IN
TIME. ONE OF CHIRAC'S CLOSE AIDES, WHEN ASKED IF
THE OMISSION COULD CAUSE COOLNESS BY THE MAYOR OF
PARIS TOWARDS THE US OR ANY LONG-TERM DAMAGE, ANSWERED
THAT CHIRAC IS BIG ENOUGH TO OVERLOOK THE CITY HALL
INCIDENT. BUT WHAT WAS MORE SERIOUS, HE CONTINUED,
WAS CITY HALL COUPLED WITH THE MITTERRAND MEETING.
THE LATTER WAS THE MORE INJURIOUS IN POLITICAL TERMS,
HE FELT, FOR IT DREW THE US PRESIDENT INTO GISCARD'S
DOMESTIC SCHEME TO FORM A CENTER-LEFT GOVERNMENT WITH
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AT LEAST PARTS OF THE SOCIALIST PARTY. THE RPR, BEING
BOTH SUSPICIOUS AND INCREDULOUS OF SUCH A PLAN, CLEARLY
BELIEVES THE US ILL ADVISED TO BECOME INVOLVED IN WHAT
IT CONSIDERS A VERY CHANCY OPERATION. IN ADDITION TO

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STRONG OBJECTIONS VOICED BY RPR STALWARTS SANGUINETTI AND DEBRE TO US "INTERFERENCE", CHIRAC DESCRIBED HIS REACTION IN A PUBLIC SPEECH JANUARY 10 AS "PROFOUNDLY SCANDALIZED" BY THE MITTERRAND MEETING AS WELL AS BY THE ABSENCE OF OFFICIAL GOF REACTIONS. HE ASKED RHETORICALLY WHAT WOULD HAVE BEEN GENERAL DE GAULLE'S REACTION IN SUCH A SITUATION.

4. PERHAPS WITH THE PRESENTIMENT, OR EVEN THE ADVANCE KNOWLEDGE, OF CHIRAC'S SPEECH FOREIGN MINISTER DE GUIRINGAUD READ A STATEMENT TO THE PRESS AT THE END OF THE JANUARY 10 COUNCIL OF MINISTERS MEETING, CRITICIZING FRANCOIS MITTERRAND FOR MEETING WITH "A FOREIGN CHIEF OF STATE PASSING THROUGH PARIS, WHILE HE DOES NOT EVEN VISIT THE ELYSEE". DE GUIRINGAUD CHIMED IN, OBVIOUSLY FOR DOMESTIC REASONS, TO PROTECT THE GOF FROM THE SCATTERED BUT GROWING CRITICISM ACROSS THE SPECTRUM OF THE POLITICAL PARTIES. EVEN CENTRIST LEADER JEAN LECANUET HAD EARLIER SOUNDED THE SAME THEME AS DE GUIRINGAUD. FINALLY, THE COMMUNISTS PREDICTABLY CALLED THE WHOLE AFFAIR, PARTICULARLY OUR CONCERNS OVER THE PCF'S ROLE IN FRANCE, AS INTOLERABLE INTERFERENCE IN FRANCE'S DOMESTIC AFFAIRS.
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